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CHAPTER II. A MALTESE SUITOR.



AY ST. GREGORY confound all Englishmen! repeated Dr. Busatti in a hissing whisper between clenched teeth as he walked home, after separating from Lieut. Curzon.

He glanced over his shoulder, cautiously, in the very utterance of the malediction, as if to ascertain whether or no the saint invoked had blighted the stalwart enemy on the spot. But the officer pursued his way at a light and brisk pace, without a backward look.

Defection gradually subdued the fierce wrath of jealousy in the breast of the young physician. Why was Dolores so portionless a maiden? He asked this question, piteously, of the blue sky and limpid sea. In his family, the bride had always brought her dowry, her household linen and embroideries, however modest, and he had been educated to laudably respect the possession of worldly goods. Still he was irresistibly attracted and charmed by the arch beauty and winning ways of Jacob Dealtzy's granddaughter, whose smiles animated his grave and somber humor on those occasions when he sought a pretext to visit the Watch Tower in the country. Dolores was glad to see Dr. Busatti. She was glad to see any visitor in her restricted existence. She played with his devotion as a kittensports with shadows, placing the paw of innocent curiosity on dark phases of passion in human nature in mere sportiveness of mood. He had cradled himself in the sweet delusions of the present hour, without too accurately defining the future, even in his own mind. Jacob Dealtzy's span of life must of necessity be brief; and, possibly, when Dolores was left alone, the heart of his own home circle would be softened toward the helpless orphan. He was a dutiful and obedient son, and had never rebelled against paternal authority, while always willing to carry his father's messages to the Tower as an opportunity to enjoy the vivacity of intercourse with Dolores, albeit she often bewildered as well as dazzled his sober faculties. Not the least element of his satisfaction consisted of the secrecy of his course. The paradise of little garden where dwelt Dolores was remote and safely hidden from all eyes save his own. Even his mother did not suspect his penchant, and Giovanni Battista especially feared his mother.

The intrusion of the British sailor, alert, handsome, and keen of eye, on the paradise of the Watch Tower was a rude shock to indolent possession of the citadel. The disciple of Esculapius was irritated and alarmed, without constitutional irresolution being confirmed into swift and decisive action. He was dissatisfied, even depressed, by the circumstance. After all, the officer might never return to Jacob Dealtzy's dilapidated abode.

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THE TOWER. A STORY OF MALTA. W. JOHNSON. BY RAND, McNALLY & CO.

of snuff with an appearance of slow enjoyment. The little woman held the silk mantle, the faldetta of Malta, over her head, which fluttered in the wind.

The couple concluded their colloquy, with many nods of mutual understanding, and much animated gesticulation, then walked on slowly.

Dr. Busatti recognized his mother and his maternal uncle, the priest of a neighboring parish. Why did a gloomy conviction smite him that they were talking about himself? Why did the roseate picture of pretty Dolores, pausing beside the fountain and the orange tree, fade as he entered the chill shadow of the street?

"Good day, my uncle," said Giovanni Battista, overtaking his relatives at the door of the paternal home, which was a modest nook of an old and spacious mansion.

"Good day, figlio mio!" replied the priest, with benevolence.

Madame Busatti surveyed her son scornfully, tossed her head slightly beneath the folds of the faldetta, and uttered a short and contemptuous laugh.

"I have been for a walk in the country," stammered Dr. Busatti, with an apprehensive glance at the maternal countenance.

"I know where you have been," she retorted sharply, and entered the house.

The uncle patted the young man on the shoulder reassuringly, and regarded him with a smile of humor.



"FOOL THAT THOU ART."

Giovanni Battista Busatti the elder was a government official, who had reared seven children on a small salary. Studious in taste, he was compiling a history of his native island in moments of leisure. Thin and cadaverous like his offspring, he was mild in disposition, and wholly swayed by the influence of his wife.

Maddalena Busatti led an existence divided between thrifty cares of her household and attending mass at the parish church.

Antonio, still more slender and dusky than his elder brother, was a student of law at the Lyceum and University. Five docile and swarthy young sisters completed the domestic circle.

Doctor Busatti took his accustomed seat at the table, and kept a vigilant eye on his mother. The good-humored gossip of the uncle, who shared the meal, did not divert him from the suspicion that something unusual had happened to excite the ruling spirit of the place.

He had not long to wait. Signora Busatti, after talking with her customary volubility on indifferent topics during the first portion of the meal, placed her two pump arms on the table and announced, with a comprehensive glance at her numerous offspring, "Giovanni Battista must select a wife."

"Yes. A good wife aids a physician to win the confidence of the community," added the priest.

"I was already married at your age," echoed the father.

Antonio smiled with the supercilious smirk of adolescence, and dipped a morsel of bread in olive oil. The swarthy little sisters giggled and nudged each other.

"There is plenty of time," said Doctor Busatti, in feeble protest, and feeling himself surrounded by domestic conspirators.

"There is no time to lose," rejoined the mother.

"I am in no haste to wed," demurred the son, wiping his brow with visible dread of arousing family wrath. "I can very well wait for another year."

Then Maddalena Busatti planted her elbows yet more firmly on the table, and spoke at length. The uncle was present to support her in unfolding her matrimonial schemes, but she required no aid, spiritual or temporal. She was a host in herself. She had found a suitable daughter-in-law in the plump heiress of a certain wine merchant down at the Port, Caterina Vacelli by name.

"Caterina Vacelli?" repeated Dr. Busatti, in troubled accents. "I have never seen the girl."

"Your uncle knows her well. He baptized her in infancy," was the gilt response.

"Is she pretty?" inquired the suitor, dolefully.

"As pretty as your own sisters," affirmed Madame Busatti with enthusiasm.

The five maidens again giggled, and whispered together, much flattered by the unexpected compliment, while Antonio dipped another morsel of bread in oil, and munched the delicacy slowly, and

scrutinized them in turn with that latent, fraternal derision observable in the youth of all races at times.

"There is a fine wedding-dowry, my son," continued the mother, impressively. "The wine merchant will not stint the supply of linen to become connected with our family."

Dr. Busatti sighed deeply, and shook his head.

"We will speak of the matter later, another day," he said, with a gesture of indignation.

Here the mother's patience became too severely tried; her black eyes snapped angrily.

"Caterina Vacelli will be won by another while you wait," she cried shrilly, and without finding it necessary to explain that she had made all requisite overtures in the name of her eldest born. "The grandchild of that heretic, Jacob Dealtzy, has bewitched thee, Giovanni Battista; fool that thou art! Have I no eyes? Do not attempt to deceive me! Ah, I know all! It is true that the girl has had some instruction from the Sisters and attends church, especially on Festas, but she is without a penny. A fine bride for my son, truly! The other day she took her mother's wedding chain to the Monte di Pieta and actually pawned it to buy some finery."

Dr. Busatti winced and his brow clouded, yet he remained silent.

His father rubbed his chin meditatively and regarded him with a quizzical expression which said more eloquently than words: "So this is the secret of your willingness to carry archaeological treasures to the Watch Tower? Your mother is more clever than the devil about finding out things, and it is useless to resist her."

The meal over, the uncle drew forth his favorite snuff box, and the family union acquired the character of a solemn conclave. Dr. Busatti did not venture to inquire how that fatal stumbling block in his own path of timid and vacillating love-making, the visit of Dolores to the pawnbroker's, had become known. In the end he submitted to the decrees of Providence.

He was presented to Caterina Vacelli, who proved to be not very young, and with shoulders rounded in a curve which would have been pronounced a humpback in a bride less well dowered.

Giovanni Battista failed in none of the duties which his new position entailed upon him. He promised to take his wife each year to the festival of San Gregorio, according to the old custom. He brought her cakes compounded of honey, sugar, and hempseed, to the satisfaction of both families.

The mocking student-of-law, Antonio, sang in a clear, tenor voice: "In the wedding, or matrimonial contract, they make this conjugal bargain. That he (the bridegroom) shall take her to the feast of San Gregorio. Shall set her upon the wall. Shall buy her a slice of sweetmeat. Made of hempseed. For that is the kind that best pleases his lady, the bride."

Thus material wisdom triumphed, and Dr. Busatti haunted the little garden of Jacob Dealtzy no more.

CHAPTER III. OVER A CUP OF TEA.

HE SAILOR ENTERS like the proverbial bull in a china shop," thought Capt. Blake, as Lieut. Curzon, pushing aside the hangings of a door behind him, struck his elbow, and sent the cup of tea which he was about to drink spinning from his grasp on the floor.

"I beg your pardon," said the newcomer, halting in dismay. "The place is dark."

"Oh, pray don't trouble about me," replied Capt. Blake, airily, and contemplating the fragments of rare Salsuma ware scattered at his feet.

"You are late, Arthur," said the hostess, greeting the new arrival with unfeigned snavity, and ignoring the broken cup, except to order a servant to remove the debris.

"I have been for a walk in the country," Lieut. Curzon rejoined as he wiped his heated brow on his pocket handkerchief. "Your tea room is deliciously cool and fragrant, Cousin Maud, but it is dark after the sun. I am awfully sorry to have smashed your china."

"This is my friend Miss Symthe, just out from England," interposed Mrs. Griffith, smiling, and presenting a young lady who was pouring tea at the table.

"Will you take cream and sugar, Lieut. Curzon?" inquired Miss Symthe in caressing accents.

"Both, please."

"Do try a sandwich, or some bread and butter," supplemented the hostess. "You must be half starved after your walk. We intend to keep you to dinner as well, even if you disobey ship's orders."

He laughed as he accepted his cup of tea.

"Perhaps Harry would not be too hard on me if I overstaid my leave, forgetting the lapse of time in such charming society as an unlucky sailor is always sure to find in your house, Maud."

Mrs. Griffith sowed a tiny seed, destined to bear later fruit, in her reply, as she selected a sandwich for her young kinsman with her own fair hands.

"Fancy Harry would not be too hard on you if you disobeyed orders?" she said.

The Harry in question, otherwise Captain the Hon. Henry Montagu Fitzwilliam, C. B., in command of H. M. S. Sparrow, was a veteran officer of dignified, not to say severe, mien; an inflexible disciplinarian, who made the lives of midshipmen and subofficials a burthen by reason of a vigilance deemed little short of galling tyranny and oppression.

Lieut. Curzon found transition of mood and surroundings alike soothing and agreeable. The idyl of youth and beauty in rags was dispelled by the presence of Mrs. Griffith and Miss Ethel Symthe, who bestowed upon the deeply appreciative sailor all those graceful and delicate attentions where-with wily sirens on land win the hearts of the followers of the sea. He was hot, a little tired and vexed, with all a young man's sense of amour propre, that he had clumsily broken a cup on entering the room. The eye of that son of Mars, Captain Blake, was still upon him, with an undefinable mockery, as of one who had scored a point in the social game to the discomfiture of a rival branch of the service. Mrs. Griffith had never been more sympathetic in cordiality of welcome. Miss Ethel Symthe, with her calm, fair face, and erect figure, was pleasant to contemplate. The softly modulated encouragement of their words and smiles pervaded his senses like a subtle perfume, even as the silken folds of their yellow tea-gowns, all creamy lace and knots of ribbon, brushed his arm. He had regained his own sphere once more after that country ramble, which should have been too trivial to leave even a surface impression on his mind.

It is in such moments of extreme reaction from the unforeseen that men of impulsive temperament cast anchor in the home haven and become sedate husbands.

Mrs. Griffith, as the wife of a military man of high rank, was the power behind the throne in the places where the general was stationed. The tact and amiability of her personal influence were perceptible at Gibraltar, Cyprus, and in India alike. She was over the Donna Pia of the miniature court of Urbino, organizing the festivities, adjusting all petty differences, giving zest and piquancy to gaiety. Her acquaintances ranged over more than half of the civilized world.

Removed to a new station, the lady invariably adapted her tea room to the requirements of a large circle, as an Arab adjusts his tent. Hence, in the palace of the Knights Templar at Malta, the low chamber opening on a court had a design of bamboo across the ceiling; the walls were wainscoted with panels of cedar, palm and red pine; and the floor covered with delicate matting. Vases filled with chrysanthemums; old screens of six panels, quaintly painted and heavily gilded; and divans covered with draperies wadded with silk, imparted, with the fragrant woods used in decoration, a pervading hue of rich brown to the room. In one corner was a curious household shrine dedicated to Buddha, with a brass lamp suspended before it, and a shelf, with a circular mirror and tiny trays for offerings of flowers, rice, and incense.

On the present occasion, Miss Symthe had insisted on kindling a stick of incense in a tiny brazier before the god, with a mischievous glance at an elderly clergyman with a weak chest.

Arthur Curzon, soothed by these feminine flatteries, asked himself what scheme his cousin might be maturing in her brain, on his own behalf, with a sentiment of awakening curiosity, as his glance followed the movements of the stout and handsome matron with the smooth black hair,

clear complexion, and tranquil gray eyes. Mrs. Griffith was an inveterate matchmaker. No doubt she had a bride ready for him. Who, then? Miss Ethel Symthe, of course. Did he not know few feminine tactics?

The young man was expansive in responsive greetings to the Ancient Mariner, otherwise Capt. John Fillingham, on the retired list, whose reminiscences extended over forty years of active service, chiefly in wooden ships; wars; the suppression of the African slave trade; or cruising off the Mosquito coast. He had shared the fresh impressions of life of midshipmen with Arthur Curzon's father, the admiral of many engagements.

A kindly old gentleman, warming rheumatic limbs in the winter sunshine of the Mediterranean shore and with a countenance like the battered figure-head of a ship, the Ancient Mariner scanned the new-comer through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and remarked to Miss Symthe, sotto voce: "A fine lad, and he will prove an exceedingly clever man, if I am not much mistaken. A chip of the old block, as well. They are called the mad Curzons, you know. His father, Admiral Jack, fell in love with such a pretty girl, but without a penny. She was a nursery governess, or something of that sort. He saw her crossing a thor-

oughfare near his club on a foggy morning. She had neatly turned ankles. Dear me! it seems but yesterday! I was best man at the wedding. We were middle-aged together."

"Fancy!" murmured Miss Symthe, and a slight glow of animation warmed her cheek.

"These young fellows are pampered nowadays," continued Capt. Fillingham. "In my time, we had to put up with salt horse and weevily biscuit, without too much complaint. The uncle, Archibald, if I am not in error—"

"John, dear, have another slice of bread and butter," interposed Mrs. Fillingham, a brisk matron, still proud of her dumping form as revealed to advantage in a Paris robe.

(To be Continued.)

Dr. Coe's Sanitarium

11th and Broadway, KANSAS CITY, MO